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MEMORIES OF BOB

by Frank DeMarco



Bob Monroe set himself a great task, which is basically the transformation of the world. He did the best he could, and his best was pretty good. The day will come when it will be more obvious, how good his best was, how much he facilitated.

When I think of Bob Monroe in his old age talking to participants during their programs, I remember chiefly his skill in defusing all the tremendous tension of people's expectations. At my *GATEWAY* in 1992, for instance, we were assembled in David Francis Hall, sitting behind tables arrayed toward the front of the room, listening to trainer Bob McCullough telling us about the history of the Institute. Then he said that to talk about where we go from here, we really should listen to Bob Monroe himself— and he points with a little flourish, and we turn around to see him standing on the stairs, awaiting his cue.

Now, remember, to nearly everyone there, he is a giant figure, but they've never met him. And here he is, in the person of an old, old man with white hair, wearing an old navy pea-jacket. He slowly walks the length of the conference room nodding to this person, that person, as he passes. (I can almost hear people reassessing; "he's an old man!") He comes to the empty chair the trainers have placed for him in the middle of the room, facing us, and slowly takes off his coat. He reaches out with it to his right side, as if it put it onto a hook—and drops it onto the floor. He shrugs. "Sometimes it's there," he says. People laugh. ("So! A comedian.") Then he asks the group, one by one, where they had come from, nodding as if absorbing the information—and not adding one word of comment! (Reassessment continues: "Well, let's be nice to the old man.") And then—having removed himself from superman status, and having thereby returned people's focus to the work at hand—he begins to talk, speaking easily and

without pretension about what they have done and what they hope to do, and taking questions. It was brilliant.

I count myself fortunate to have attended two TMI programs while Bob Monroe was still alive, and I regret that I did not make notes of his talks to our *GATEWAY* or *GUIDELINES* groups. I have two vivid memories, one from *GATEWAY*, one from *GUIDELINES*.

At *GATEWAY*, he was talking to us one night in the debrief room—the conference room off what was then the dining room. Probably in response to a question, he said that all of us were here at this time because we had chosen to be here. As he put it, we had chosen to be on stage rather than be in the audience when the once-in-many-lifetimes event took place. This, he said, was because we were deeply curious about the process. He said that whenever we read or talked about the upcoming disruption of ordinary life, "You say 'how horrible,' but you think 'how interesting!'" I got a fit of the giggles—something that doesn't happen to me just every day—and couldn't stop, because it so accurately described my own (perhaps cold-blooded) reaction to the subject. I had often thought, in some impatience at the Downstairs life I led, "Enough of this old stuff! Bring on the new world." And here was Bob Monroe describing my reaction exactly. I continued helplessly laughing, "hee, hee, hee" for several seconds, until Bob craned his head around to see who had gotten the point so personally.

I thought, "Well, who has given us more to work with than you?" He got a sense, at that moment—or at least I hope he did—of how wide-ranging an effect his efforts were having, and would have unpredictably into the future.

Out of everything Bob said to us that night, what chiefly struck home was that in Guidelines we were going to discover who we really were; that we were going inside. This sounded perfect to me: This was just where I thought we should be going. He strongly suggested that we remember to use the left brain. As he puts it, "Wallow for a while, then let the worm in." That is, first wallow in sensation—go with the pattern, use the right brain for perception—then use the worm of left-brain logic to analyze. [Emphasis added, Ed.] I noted the suggestion, but that wasn't the same thing as following it. I was enjoying the free use of the right brain so much, I neglected the left brain entirely. It would have been better if I had paid more attention.)

On Friday morning, March 17, 1995, he died an old man's quiet death, in a hospital in Charlottesville, with his children at his side. He died, of pneumonia, half a year after his 79th birthday.

The next morning, I bought the Saturday New York Times, just to read Bob's obituary—which wasn't there. I thought, "you don't have any idea how important he was, or what he accomplished," and I remembered Emerson saying of Thoreau's death, "The country knows not yet, or in the least part, how great a son it has lost."

A week later, TMI held a memorial service, and I attended. When I returned from it I wrote up some impressions, thinking of those who knew and loved him who couldn't attend. I posted these impressions to the Voyagers mailing list. I predict that there will come a day when even these notes will have a minor historical importance, strictly because they represent a first-hand account, however inadequate, of what will come to be seen as an historic milestone. In another hundred years, I think, scarcely an educated person on Earth will not at least have heard Bob Monroe's name.

March 26, 1995

Dear Friends, here are some notes on the Friday March 24, 1995, memorial service for Bob, for those friends who couldn't make it in the body.

We drove up to the training center. The unusual began immediately: people directing parking on the lawn. Folding chairs, set up outside the sliding doors of David Francis Hall, faced westward toward that lovely view of the far mountains. Facing the chairs was a microphone and a little platform, and two enormous sound speakers. At a table off to the side were Mark Certo and two others, to control the special effects. The day was bright, sunny, with a wind that gusted stiff enough to make us warm on the south side, cold on the north side.

In my experience, religious ceremonies often have at least patches of emotional deadness; places that don't resonate, words that are only empty words. This ceremony, conducted by the Rev. Shay Saint John, had none of this deadness. But then, how could it? The first thing to come over the speakers was Bob's voice, repeating the affirmation he wrote long ago. You may have heard the words once or twice: "I am more than my physical body...."

Rev. Saint John spoke of Bob and then invited each of the family to speak. Bob's brother Emmet; his stepdaughters Penny and Scooter, and Scooter's husband, Joe McMoneagle; his stepson A.J.; his daughter Laurie. I am sorry I cannot give even a précis of what was said. I used to be a journalist once upon a time, but this day I was not in reporter mode; the words came washing in, affecting me to the core, then washed out, leaving little or nothing in short-term memory. I am left not with the specifics but with visual memories, and with the memory of the emotional impact. Scooter read a poem Nancy (Bob's wife) had written him, I remember that.

Then the family gathered in a circle, holding hands, holding the two white helium-filled balloons that had been whipping around in the wind the entire time. Rev. Saint John told us what would happen and invited us to stand up at the proper moment. Over the speakers came Bob's voice, reading the climactic point of the "Going Home" tapes, advising the dying person that he or she was going to find that he or she was everything he or she had ever learned, ever been. And at a certain point the family released the balloons, and that terrific wind whipped them off to the south. As we had been invited to do, we all stood and watched the balloons fly off, two white

points against that deep blue sky, climbing and also covering the ground at an incredible rate, and then they were out of our visual range, and Bob's voice was giving his final advice, telling the departing soul, "Remember. Remember."

"Remember," he said. As though we who are his heirs could ever forget. As though our inner connection could ever cease.

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Each of us, as we come back into this world, set ourselves tasks, some of whose aspects are internal and some external. The greatest tasks take the longest to show their full effects, and are therefore the most easily underrated, and those who do accomplish them are underrated correspondingly. It takes a while for people to see what they had in their midst. Bob Monroe set himself a great task, which is basically the transformation of the world. He did the best he could, and his best was pretty good. The day will come when it will be more obvious, how good his best was, how much he facilitated.

